

# Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies

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Volume 1

Issue 1 Fall, Inaugural Issue

Article 2

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June 2015

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### Recommended Citation

Eisler, Riane (2015) "A Conversation with Archbishop Desmond Tutu: Leaders Transforming Cultures," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies*: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 2. Available at: <http://pubs.lib.umn.edu/ijps/vol1/iss1/2>



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## A CONVERSATION WITH ARCHBISHOP DESMOND TUTU: LEADERS TRANSFORMING CULTURES

*Interviewed by Riane Eisler, JD, PhD(hon)*

### Abstract

Riane Eisler talks with Nobel laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu about transforming cultures from domination to partnership and progress in this direction, including changing traditions of violence against women and children, gender equality, and the role of religious leaders and scholars in transforming cultures.

**Keywords:** cultural transformation; domination; Girls Not Brides; Global eHealth Foundation; human rights; Nobel Peace Prize; partnership; The Elders; violence; women leaders

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**Riane Eisler:** Thank you, Archbishop Tutu, for your willingness to be a part of this inaugural issue of *The Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies*. I want to start by congratulating you on your work, which led to your being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

**Desmond Tutu:** I am honored to do the interview.

**Eisler:** You have been a leader in working for peace, racial and economic equity, and human rights, including the still far too marginalized human rights of the majority of the population: women and children. Research shows that these primary human relationships must be given much more attention if we are to better understand societies and use that understanding to bring about urgently needed cultural transformation to a more equitable, sustainable, caring world; in other words, if we are to support and accelerate the shift from domination to partnership.

As you know, I have been working on this cultural transformation, and this journal is dedicated to gathering and publishing the best scholarship on the subject, as well as contributions from practitioners and others working to facilitate and accelerate this shift. The vision of our journal is “To share scholarship and create connections for cultural transformation to build a world in which all relationships, institutions, policies, and organizations are based on principles of partnership.” We define partnership systems as contrasted with domination systems in terms of the social configurations outlined in the chart I shared with you [shown at the end of this article].

As a world leader whose statements have great impact, your thoughts about the process of transforming cultures, and the trends you see, are valuable to all of us engaged in this work. Based on the model of partnership systems and domination systems I shared with you, what signs do you see that societies are transforming in a partnership direction?

**Tutu:** I believe there is a slight shift from domination to partnership. In terms of gender partnership, a few global business conglomerates are headed up by women. More and more national governments, not just in Western countries but in developing countries as well, have or have had women leaders—for example, Argentina, Bangladesh, Brazil, Central African Republic, Chile, Kosovo, Liberia, Lithuania, Malawi, Malta, Sri Lanka, and South Korea. Women are or have been heads of state in New Zealand, Canada, Israel, and many West European nations, including Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, Finland, and Norway. The current CEO of the International Monetary Fund is a woman, Christine Lagarde.

We realize that God was not wrong when God said, “It is not good for man to be alone.” The Church of England has at last acknowledged this by voting to have women consecrated as bishops, following the example of other parts of the Anglican Communion.

Unfortunately, there is still widespread male chauvinism in parts of the world, glaringly in Nigeria in incidents such as Boko Haram's abduction of those who have come to be described heartwarmingly as "our girls."

**Eisler:** Research shows that a major obstacle to peace, justice, and human rights is the devaluation of women and the "feminine" (caring, caregiving, non-violence), and that violence against women and children is a global pandemic. What signs of shifts in gender roles and relations do you see?

**Tutu:** The evidence is often inconsistent. In South Africa, the government at various levels is doing splendidly in making provision for children through child grants for mothers with children. The authorities are doing all they can to protect vulnerable children, but because of myths about sex with a virgin curing HIV, there have been shocking instances of infants being raped by adult men. More does need to be done to safeguard the sanctity of children's lives. Society must continue to be vigilant and to guard sanctity of life, especially the lives of the most vulnerable. The extent of a nation's development is linked closely to how it treats its most vulnerable members.

**Eisler:** What can be the role of religious leaders in ending violence against women and children, and the role of religion in general in accelerating the cultural shift from domination to partnership systems worldwide?

**Tutu:** Especially in the developing world and to a lesser extent in the more affluent developed world, religious leaders still have a significant role. They have captive audiences at least once a week, and they can use that influential position to promote a more positive role for women. It is happening. After all, they hold up half the sky.

**Eisler:** You are a member and for six years were chair of the Elders, a distinguished group of global leaders who work together for peace and human rights originally

brought together in 2007 by Nelson Mandela. What role do you think this influential group can play in raising awareness of the urgent need for protecting the human rights of women and children if we are to move from domination to partnership in politics, education, economics, and society in general?

**Tutu:** As women and men who have played significant roles nationally and internationally, and who generally pose no threat to incumbent office bearers (members of the Elders cannot be current office holders), the Elders are playing a very significant role in this regard. Several of them are women who have held high national and international positions; they are walking sermons embodying what they are proclaiming. They helped to establish Girls Not Brides, an international body with member organizations in 60 countries dedicated to the eradication of child marriage. They have a web site, [www.girlsnotbrides.org](http://www.girlsnotbrides.org) where your readers can learn more about this movement that is transforming cultures.

**Eisler:** What role can scholars play? What role can this journal play?

**Tutu:** Those who influence public opinion can assist in accelerating this very important change by their own example, in treating women and girl children with real respect for their inherent dignity as those created in the image of God, thus being God carriers on a par with their male counterparts. We are not doing them a favour. It is due to them as God's viceroys in just the same manner as men.

Scholars can influence beliefs and attitudes. They can provide evidence for the benefits of partnership systems and the human and economic costs of domination systems. Your new book, *The Real Wealth of Nations*, shows how we can build economic systems that meet both our material and spiritual needs.

**Eisler:** What are you actively involved in right now that has a connection to cultural transformation?

**Tutu:** My answer to your question relates to my recent visit to Zambia. I mentioned that the Elders helped to found Girls Not Brides, the organization seeking to end the destructive practice of child marriage. We were visiting Zambia with a delegation from Girls Not Brides to reinforce what the Zambian Government and traditional leaders are busy with: ending child marriage. I am involved in this campaign to change attitudes and practices that are clearly undermining our societies.

I'm also involved with an organization called the Global eHealth Foundation that seeks to use the Internet to make the expert medical knowledge and health care that is so readily available in the affluent, developed world available in the less well off and less developed parts of our world. Doctor and patient do not need to be in the same room. A specialist in London can help diagnose a patient in Mali if the specialist can access the patient electronically. It is already possible to monitor, say, diabetic patients electronically, to check their sugar levels and to remind them to take their insulin. They don't need to be in the same geographical space with those treating them.

**Eisler:** Again, thank you so much, Archbishop Tutu, for joining us in the launch of this first issue of *The Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies*. You have been and continue to be a powerful voice for these principles. So it is a particular honor for us to have your important words as part of our premiere issue.

**Tutu:** God bless you.

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Desmond Tutu is a South African social rights activist and retired Anglican bishop who rose to worldwide fame during the 1980s as an opponent of apartheid. He was the first black Archbishop of

Cape Town and bishop of the Church of the Province of Southern Africa (now the Anglican Church of Southern Africa). He has been active in defending human rights, addressing HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, poverty, racism, sexism, and homophobia. He received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984; the Albert Schweitzer Prize for Humanitarianism in 1986; the Pacem in Terris Award in 1987; the Sydney Peace Prize in 1999; the Gandhi Peace Prize in 2007; and the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2009. He is an author or co-author of numerous books and articles. He is currently honorary Co-chair of the World Justice Project, a global, multidisciplinary effort to strengthen the Rule of Law for the development of communities of opportunity and equity.

Riane Eisler, JD, PhD (hon), is a systems scientist best known as author of *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* and *The Real Wealth of Nations: Creating a Caring Economics*, and other books and articles. She is president of the Center for Partnership Studies, and consults with businesses and governments on applications of the partnership model introduced in her work. She taught at UCLA and Immaculate Heart College, and currently teaches in the graduate Transformative Leadership Program at the California Institute of Integral Studies. She sits on many boards and councils, including the World Future Council and the Club of Rome. She is founder of the Caring Economy Campaign and co-founder, with Nobel Laureate Betty Williams, of the Spiritual Alliance to Stop Intimate Violence. Dr. Eisler has received honors for her work for peace and human rights, including the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation's Distinguished Peace Leadership Award.

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## THE DOMINATION/PARTNERSHIP CONTINUUM



### Domination System

### Partnership System

1. Structure	Authoritarian and inequitable social and economic structure of rigid hierarchies of domination in <i>both</i> family and state.	Democratic and economically equitable structure of linking and hierarchies of actualization in <i>both</i> family and state.
2. Relations	High degree of fear, abuse, and violence, ranging from child and wife beating to other forms of abuse by “superiors” in families, workplaces, and society. Children grow up in punitive, authoritarian, male-dominated families where they observe and experience inequality as the accepted norm.	Mutual respect and trust with a low degree of fear, abuse, and violence, since they are not required to maintain rigid rankings of domination. Children grow up in families where parenting is authoritative rather than authoritarian and adult relations are egalitarian.
3. Gender	Ranking of the male half of humanity over the female half, as well as rigid gender stereotypes, with traits and activities viewed as masculine, such as “toughness” and conquest, ranked over those viewed as feminine, such as “softness” and caregiving.	Equal valuing of the male and female halves of humanity, as well as fluid gender roles with a high valuing of empathy, caring, caregiving, and nonviolence in both women and men, as well as in social and economic policy.
4. Beliefs	Beliefs and stories justify and idealize domination and violence, which are presented as “natural,” inevitable, moral, and desirable.	Beliefs and stories recognize and give high value to empathic, mutually beneficial, and caring relations, which are which are recognized as part of “human nature” and considered moral and desirable.

**\* Note that no system is a pure partnership or domination system. It is always a matter of degree, depending on where it is situated along the partnership/domination continuum.**

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